# A sigh of relief

A summary of the phase one results from the Securing Safety study

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RESEARCHING CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION, VIOLENCE AND TRAFFICKING

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# Introduction

When practitioners are faced with young people who are being sexually exploited, coerced to traffic drugs around the country, or who have experienced serious violence in their communities, they sometimes move them a significant distance from their homes and communities. How often, for what purpose, and to what effect are such relocations used? While there may always be situations where it is necessary to move a young person, and sometimes their entire family, in order to keep them safe, anecdotal unease about the practice of relocations means there is far more we need to understand to ensure that such a disruptive, and costly, intervention is used to best effect.

This research briefing presents the findings from the first phase of the *Securing Safety* study, which seeks to understand the rate, cost and impact of relocations of young people in response to extra-familial harm. It builds on studies into the use of fostering, residential care and secure settings during interventions for young people affected by sexual exploitation (Beckett, 2011; Ellis, 2018; Firmin, 2018; Shuker, 2013; Sturrock and Holmes, 2015) to focus specifically on how such interventions are used for broader forms of extra-familial harm and what their effective and ethical use might entail in the future.

Engaging 15 local authorities in England and Wales, we begin to build a national picture of how often, why and in what circumstances this form of intervention is used to protect children and young people. The data collected in year one builds a rich picture of the complex and contested use of relocation. It highlights that moves are sometimes used as the only means of keeping a young person physically safe, that they can both disrupt and repair relationships, and that while they can be used to enable young people to access therapeutic support, consideration of the emotional impact of a relocation may be de-prioritised against other risks.

Relocation can create a moment of relative safety for a young person, with one practitioner sharing that 'everyone breathes a sigh of relief' when a move is complete. Considering the findings from the first year of our study we propose an interim set of recommendations and ask, if relocations offer a sigh of relief, who for?

## *Briefing structure*

This briefing is structured to report the statistical and thematic findings of the first phase of the *Securing Safety* study. The objectives of the study are detailed, followed by a summary of the methodologies employed during each stage. Findings are ordered to report: the rate of relocation; the conditions under which those relocations occurred; the purpose for which they were used; their perceived impact, and the emerging tensions in the use of relocation – primarily whether their purpose is realised in their impact. The briefing closes with interim recommendations that emerge from this first phase dataset along with an outline of the second phase of the study.

## *Securing Safety study*

Relocations (out-of-area placements, family relocations, secure welfare beds and other forms of movement) are currently used as a safeguarding intervention when young people are exposed to, or are at risk of, extra-familial harm including child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation. These relocations are qualitatively different from other forms of placements as they are a means of moving a young person away from a harm that is taking place outside the family home. There is an increasing interest in contextual and holistic approaches to safeguarding young people (Firmin, 2017; Featherstone et al, 2018), with a focus on keeping young people safe in the spaces that they use on a daily basis. There is a need to look at where relocation has a role to play in contextual safety.

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A growing body of research has highlighted the limited scope within traditional child protection systems to address harm that takes place outside the home (Firmin, 2017). Recently, this has gained traction at a policy level with 'contextual safeguarding' being written into 'Working Together' child safeguarding guidance (HM Government, 2018). Crucially, this places a duty on agencies to address and intervene in risk *faced by* families and young people *outside* the home (HM Government, 2018). Relocations as a response to extra-familial risk therefore need to be located within this academic and policy discourse; as they are used when contextual safety cannot be ensured for young people and their families in the spaces where they spend their time (for example their neighbourhoods and schools). At present, there is a limited body of research or evaluation that speaks to the effectiveness of such relocations, and practitioners report varied levels of success, particularly that young people often return to their home local authority where the harm occurred (Sturrock and Holmes, 2015).

Simultaneously, there is a body of academic literature that reflects the experiences of safety of young people in secure and out-of-area placements (Shuker, 2013; Ellis, 2018). This literature asks the question of what it means to keep a young person safe, and proposes that those responsible for child welfare consider multiple dynamics and experiences of safety. For example, relocations may be used when a child cannot be kept physically safe, but at the same time moving a young person away from their friends and family may undermine their relational and psychological safety (Shuker, 2013). If the success of a relocation (or any other intervention) is measured only by its impact on physical safety this provides only a partial picture of the holistic impact of the intervention on a child's and family's experience of safety.

There is no consistent evidence base about the rate and cost of relocations in response to extra-familial harm. Nor is there evidence linking this cost with an impact assessment considering multidimensional experiences of safety. This research project aims to contribute to the national picture of the relocation of adolescents exposed to or at risk of extra-familial abuse to enable local authorities to maximise the effectiveness of their interventions on young people's and families' experience of safety. Using a mixed methods approach, the research project will investigate how frequently local authorities relocate adolescents in response to extra-familial abuse or risk and in what circumstances (scale), the financial cost of relocations for local authorities (cost) and the impact of relocation on local authorities and on the young people and families who are relocated (impact).

The project has three phases:

- Phase one – Rate: Carrying out a literature review to establish what is known about the use of relocation as a response to extra-familial harm. Approximating the rate at which relocation is used as a response to extra-familial harm by surveying local authorities on their use of relocation, and conducting debrief interviews with survey participants to put their figures in context.
- Phase two – Cost and impact: Approximating the cost of these relocations through the use of the methods underpinning the Cost Calculator for Children's Services; engaging professionals from three of the participating local areas in a 'time use and decision making' focus group and interviewing three finance managers. Exploring the impact of relocation through interviews with 15 young people who have experienced relocation and their parents/carers and professional network.
- Phase Three: Developing impactful and accessible resources on relocation built on the study findings, with and for young people, parents/carers and professionals involved in this intervention.

For full details of the study visit www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk

# Phase 1 Methodology

The first phase of the *Securing Safety* study was delivered in three parts: a literature review; a survey of local areas, and debrief interviews with professionals from areas who participated in the survey. The combined dataset was used to understand the rate at which relocation was used as a response to extra-familial harm (EFH), and the circumstances of its use. Each stage of data collection is summarised below. A detailed account of the phase 1 methodology can be accessed in Appendix A.

## *Literature review*

The review focused on UK literature in the English language from 1990 to 2019, a time frame chosen due to implementation of the legal framework established by the Children's Act (1989). The terms: serious youth violence, gang violence and/or affiliation, child criminal exploitation, child sexual exploitation, peer-on-peer abuse/violence, trafficking and radicalisation were searched in relation to criteria concerning placement and movement, such as being relocated to residential homes, secure units or foster provision. The search highlighted a lack of directly relevant literature on EFH and placements and returned a relatively small evidence base. Themes in the literature were identified and organised in relation to Shuker's (2013) multidimensional model of safety, developed from a specific focus on child sexual exploitation (CSE), which emphasises the need to address physical, relational and psychological safety in any relocation intervention, in order to achieve better outcomes for children and young people at risk of exploitation and extra-familial harm.

Findings from the review were used to inform the approach to designing the local area survey and practitioner interviews that form the basis of this briefing. Despite the evidence gaps, four key themes emerged from the literature that helped to guide the remainder of this phase of the study:

1. Different relocation contexts can create or undermine a sense of safety.

2. Relocations can achieve or compromise physical, psychological and relational safety for young people.

3. The use of relocation can restrict, or struggle to engage with, adolescent agency, leaving young people without a sense of choice or control in their lives

4. Relocation can create stability or instability which is relevant to all dimensions of safety.

## *Local area survey*

A sample of local authorities in England and Wales (n=20) were invited to take part in a survey to establish approximate data on the rate of relocations of young people in response to extra-familial harm. Invitations were targeted and opportune – focused on authorities where the research team or our partners had an existing relationship, and aiming for a geographical spread in representation (Appendix A). Of the 20 invited, 17 agreed to participate and 13 submitted survey results.

The project team adopted a collaborative approach by working with local authorities to establish a method for estimating the rate at which relocation is used as a response to EFH nationally, without putting undue pressure on local capacity. A survey was designed in consultation with local authorities who were working with the Contextual Safeguarding team on various projects (n=7) and our project partners at the Rees Centre, Oxford University. During the consultation, local authorities fed back that they did not routinely record all

categories of EFH, or those young people in out-of-area placements due to EFH, and a manual process for establishing this data was co-created between the research team and the seven local areas who took part in the consultation.

This resulted in a process in which local authorities/areas who agreed to participate in the study were asked to undertake a deep, manual dive in to their open cases over a one-month period to establish which young people were known to services due to EFH and how many of them were relocated.

Following consultation with local practitioners, a survey was created on the survey-hosting platform Qualtrics, consisting of 22 questions (see Appendix A). The survey was made up of three sections and captured information on the numbers of young people whose cases were open to children's social care in September 2019, how many of these were open due to EFH and the numbers of young people in out-of-area placements due to EFH. Additional data regarding missing episodes and demographics were also collected.

The key definitions used and outlined at the beginning of the survey were as follows:

- Young people: ages 10 to 25 inclusive (to include young people known to leaving care teams).

- Extra-familial harm: Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 states '[a]s well as threats to the welfare of children from within their families, children may be vulnerable to abuse or exploitation from outside their families. These extra-familial threats might arise at school and other educational establishments, from within peer groups, or more widely from within the wider community and/or online. These threats can take a variety of different forms and children can be vulnerable to multiple threats, including: exploitation by criminal gangs and organised crime groups such as county lines; trafficking, online abuse; sexual exploitation and the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation.'

- Relocation: When a young person is moved out of the area where they are ordinarily resident for a period of more than 24 hours as a means of providing safety due to risk of extra-familial harm. This may include the use of secure accommodation and out-of-area placements, including residential children's homes and foster placements.

Personalised survey links were emailed to a single point of contact at each site, who coordinated returns (more detail Appendix A).

13 local authorities completed the survey. The data was entered into the software package SPSS and cleaned in order to identify any errors or inconsistencies. Participants were contacted to clarify any inconsistencies. The data was analysed to determine the proportion of young people in each area whose cases were open to children's services due to EFH and the rate at which those young people were placed in out-of-area placements. Statistical tests were run in SPSS to establish correlation between survey variables, i.e. harm/placement type and rate of relocation. The data was calculated at individual site level and then aggregated.

### Debrief interviews

The 13 local authorities who submitted survey results also participated in debrief interviews, along with a further two who withdrew from the survey. Debrief interviews were semi-structured and used to establish: how relocation (as a response to EFH) was recorded by each local authority; the circumstances in which relocation was used; and any local practice

changes or discussions that had taken place as a result of their participation. All interviews took place via the video conferencing platform Zoom and were transcribed for analysis.

A thematic analysis was conducted on the interview data. A member of the research team listened to all recordings and reviewed the transcripts to identify the themes that emerged. These themes were discussed with the wider research team, including the team member who led the interviews, before a final set of themes and sub-themes was identified. These themes were linked back to the overarching research questions before being used to code interview transcripts using NVivo software. Additional codes under 'queries' were added throughout the process of analysis to pick up themes that emerged during the process and didn't fit into the initial framework. The full coding framework is provided in Appendix A.

### Ethics

Ethical approval for phase one of the study was granted by the University of Bedfordshire, Institute of Applied Social Science Research Institute Ethics Panel.

Additional approval for the study was provided by the Association of Directors of Children's Services.

### Limitations

Year one was collected from 13 local areas across England and Wales. The final sample represented a mixture of rural and urban local authorities/areas, with small and large populations and captured sites in the North, East, South and West of England, Wales and major cities, but are not a statistically representative sample. There was also gaps in the data they were able to provide. The data is therefore an approximation of the rate at which relocation is used as a response to EFH in these sites, and can only be interpreted as such.

## Phase 1 Findings

Findings from the first phase of *Securing Safety* demonstrate many consistencies, but also some variations, in how local authorities and wider safeguarding partnerships use relocations to safeguard young people affected by extra-familial harm.

Local authorities varied in the rate at which they used out-of-area placements as a response to extra-familial harm. Local alternatives to out-of-area placements also differed; some areas have access to specialist foster placements and local authority residential children's homes as part of their response to abuse beyond families. Local authorities used a range of techniques to generate data on the rate at which they used relocation, largely associated with how they used case management systems, flagging mechanisms, panels and risk assessment processes.

Participants provided a more consistent narrative on the motivation for using out-of-area placements than on the rates at which they did so. The primary driver for such an intervention in all areas was concern about the physical safety of young people, in some cases exacerbated (or characterised) by young people increasingly going missing or a deterioration in their emotional and psychological well-being. Most sites also paid considerable attention to the security, and therefore safety, young people experienced through relationships – with parents, professionals and peers – and grappled with how to protect such relationships when using relocation.

The overarching perspective on relocation from most sites was one of unease. All those who used relocation believed that there were occasions when it was required to safeguard young people, and a number provided case examples where it had been used to that effect. However all sites who used relocation aspired to do so as a short-term intervention, coupled with a plan for creating sustainable safety in a young person's home community and thereby allowing them to return. Relocation alone was not perceived as a final intervention.

And yet nearly all sites acknowledged that plans to bring young people back to their home authority following relocation required further work, and that an inability to achieve this undermined the effectiveness of relocations. This limitation was aggravated by interventions that largely focused on 'fixing' young people during periods of relocation – rather than attending to the contextual factors that had resulted in the relocation in the first place. The level of concern raised about transitioning back from out-of-area placements, and in some cases into adult services, suggests that more work is required to understand the conditions in which out-of-area placements can achieve sustained safety for young people affected by extra-familial harm.

The remainder of this section provides a detailed account of the findings that underpin the summary above, structured into sections on: the rate at which relocation is used in cases of extra-familial harm; the conditions that facilitate or prevent the use of relocation; the purpose of relocations and their perceived impact, and tensions around the use of relocation that require resolution.

## Rate and demographics of relocation

In total the 13 areas who returned a survey identified 2,128 young people affected by extra-familial harm who were being supported by children's and families' services in the month of September 2019. 215 of these young people were known to be living in an out-of-area placement as a result of this harm in the same month. This equates to relocation being used with 10.1% of the young people identified by services as affected by extra-familial harm: 7% of young people in out-of-area placements (n=16) had experienced multiple relocations in September. A further 29 relocations were reported as being in the planning phase. The most frequently used legal basis for a relocation was Section 31 (n=90). Residential children's homes were the most frequently used form of out-of-area placement (n=92). 17 of the 215 young people were in secure placements on welfare grounds.

The rate of relocation varied across authorities. Two didn't use any out-of-area placements in the month of September despite both identifying young people experiencing extra-familial harm (n=44 and n=7). Both reported making a strategic and operational decision not to use out-of-area placements, and to try to return children who had been previously moved away to the local authority area:

> *We identify that our entire strategy around looked-after children is bringing children back home rather than having them placed miles away.* (Interview, LA-M)

> *We probably about five or six years ago took the decision that actually placing children in external provision… isn't the best thing, because it takes them out of the area, it takes them away from their family, and you can't support them as well. So we've worked hard to bring children back into the authority.* (Interview, LA-C)

Two local authorities had placed a quarter of their young people affected by extra-familial harm in out-of-area placements (n=29 and n=45), and for another two areas the figure was 15% and 16% (n=19 and n=43).

91 out of 215 young people who were in out-of-area placements due to extra-familiar harm were 16-17 years old, 83 were between the ages of 13-15, only 6 were between 10 and 12 and 34 young people were over the age of 18 (data was missing for one young person). 111 were identified as male and 103 as female. Across the sites, the ethnicity of the young people in out-of-area placements due to extra-familial harm were: 123 white, 40 Black, 28 mixed 6 Asian and 11 of any other ethnic background. Ethnicity data was not returned for six young people. 41 young people were reported as having a diagnosed disability, however six out of the 13 sites did not return disability data.

A positive statistically significant relationship was identified between the use of out-of-area placements and child sexual exploitation ($rr_{ss}$ = .71, $p$ < .01). This was despite many interviewees explaining that the risks posed by criminal exploitation (especially related to the distribution of drugs) specifically drove the need for out-of-area placements:

> *But I think other than those children who are subject to Osman warnings [warnings given by the police of a death threat or high risk of murder] where there is a real threat on their life and it goes from no threat to a massive threat, all the others will work through a scale of trying to find suitable accommodation in [our area].* (Interview, LA-A)

> *On the occasions that we have moved out of borough, it would have been mainly in relation to safety. So if there's a concern, a drug debt for example, the young person saying they were receiving threats, then we would look at placing outside of [our area].* (Interview, LA-F)

### *Gaps in evidence base*

Areas reported a number of gaps in their evidence base: both in terms of how they recorded and reported extra-familial harm and how they documented different types of relocation. As a result, the rates reported may not reflect total figures for participating areas.

Participants were confident in their figures on child sexual exploitation, and increasingly so in relation to criminal exploitation. However, few reported confidence in records related to rates of serious youth violence, peer-on-peer abuse, domestic abuse in teenage relationships or radicalisation – or the extent to which these issues have resulted in a relocation.

Some participants explained that they didn't have or use flags for these wider forms of harm, or that not all of the types of harm listed in the survey featured on their 'reasons for contact' list at the point of referral:

> *I think, like a number of places actually… we're quite good at recording and tracking children who are at risk of child sexual exploitation, but less good when it comes to other forms of exploitation, harm. Well, we don't track other forms of contextual safeguarding concerns, so things like peer-on-peer abuse. We simply don't have any kind of markers or systems for tracking it day to day.* (Interview, LA-D)

> *It was an immense task, initially we identified quite quickly… that some of the key areas that you wanted us to report on weren't included on the contact reasons, so that prompted a bit of work, so that was something that had to be done first.* (Interview, LA-F)

Others described how their local safeguarding response to extra-familial harm was primarily focused on exploitation, and this resulted in knowledge gaps related to other forms of harm:

> *It didn't surprise me that the main area for us, the higher numbers, was around county lines and sexual exploitation. So that didn't surprise me at all, because we're dealing*

*with those cases on a regular basis really. I guess for me around the peer-on-peer abuse, when you actually look at it and pin it down, it does make you think about things and think about practice and how we support young people.* (Interview, LA-C)

*When you look at your summary of the different types of extra-familial harm, we've made a conscious decision only to record criminal and sexual exploitation as opposed to the others.*
*Interviewer: What was the rationale for choosing those two categories of harm? Because we identified those as the main area of need…* (Interview, LA-G)

*I think other local authorities as well have become too probably focused on 'in vogue' areas of concern and maybe media hype, and to the detriment then of other things like, for example, your serious youth violence and peer-on-peer abuse, which probably hadn't had that kind of attention that your CSE has had, for right reasons of course but not necessarily helpful in this world, which seems to be quite knee jerk in terms of how it responds to trends and patterns.* (Interview, LA-H)

Given these gaps it is somewhat unsurprising that eight of the 13 areas that returned surveys didn't report any young people being supported by children and family services in September 2019 due to peer-on-peer abuse; six didn't report any young people affected by serious youth violence, with a further two identifying one young person each; and few identified any young people affected by teenage relationship abuse, with those that did grouping it in the 'other' category of harm.

A number of interview participants queried whether a focus on exploitation skewed their local understanding of young people's needs and experiences related to extra-familial harm – with some suggesting that an overarching category and/or flag to denote that harm was 'extra-familial', with sub-categories to be used as appropriate, might help:

*So, child sexual exploitation was easy to pull, trafficking was pretty easy to pull, as was modern slavery. However, for the other items then it was more difficult because they didn't have standalone categories. And on the back of that, it's something that we've since resolved through IT to capture those various types of extra-familial harm.* (Interview, LA-H)

*We have just launched a new form and we've built in one of our questions around categories of harm. We've added extra-familial harm as one of our categories, but they only got launched last month so we've got quite a small data set at the moment around that. So, that will include if there's a child protection strategy held, whatever the legal status of the child it will tell us whether the risk was familial, extra-familial or both.* (Interview, LA-I)

Reaching a similar conclusion, others noted the complication of only using distinct categories of exploitation without one that was also overarching when recording information about young people who experienced several forms of harm at different times during the period of support being offered

*The reality is, CSE might be the thing that's predominantly occurring on them but also that taking some drugs from one location to another, that going to shops and stealing things, assaulting other people to conform to their behaviours was all happening. Really, in my mind they were exploited across the whole spectrum but they would only ever been flagged for CSE if they came to light now because of their behaviour.* (Interview, LA-A)

*Our CE list started very much as a CSE list and then we were saying we need to understand the differentiation of risk and I was being quite challenging at the time saying*

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*actually we should be looking at risk across the board… But we've got to the farcical point that we have a CE list which has some information about sexual exploitation and some information about criminal exploitation and wouldn't you believe it, our girls are being sexually exploited and our boys are being criminally exploited.* (Interview, LA-E)

*Do we have a shared understanding of when and how we talk about peer-on-peer abuse, for example? When the data comes back, it will be interesting for us to test that… particularly peer-on peer-abuse within CCE [child criminal exploitation]… my hypothesis is perhaps we're not that clear.* (Interview, LA-I)

Similarly, some participants explained how some young people experienced harm both within and external to their families: in these cases relocations were sometimes used in response to challenges within families, some in response to risks external to those families and some for a combination of the two. Recording systems were not versatile enough to document this in a reportable fashion:

*It's not all to do with extra-familial harm. While she was at high risk of CSE here we had quite a few investigations going on. There were numerous issues going on in her family. There was domestic violence between her mum and her dad, her mum and her partner. She had young siblings that were being removed and placed for adoption.* (Interview, LA-J)

*My worry is that contextual safeguarding might be seen as this is how we resolve issues for adolescents because the narrative is that the child protection system doesn't work for adolescents and therefore we need to think different. My worry with that is that quite often that isn't the case. Quite often we have children experiencing extensive intra familial harm but we only see the extra-familial harm because that's how it's presented.* (Interview, LA-E)

In light of such complexity it wasn't always possible for areas to report on the driver behind a relocation and the extent to which it was the result of extra-familial risks. Further to this, some interview participants highlighted a gap in reporting relocations that were triggered by the police (such as whole-family moves for protection linked to serious violence); as well as occasions where parents/carers made informal arrangements to take young people out of dangerous situations by using short stays with relatives or taking a decision to move their whole family to another part of the country or aboard.

Such gaps in the dataset speak to wider challenges that professionals experienced in responding to the survey: challenges that raise questions about present levels of oversight of extra-familial harm and relocations, and how to enhance this in future.

## *Challenges of gathering data*

All those authorities who completed the survey and two who were unable to do so identified challenges with collating the data required. Many were unable to produce reports on relocation rates associated with extra-familial harm and so relied on manual processes to collect the data from case notes, meetings from panels and conversations with professionals:

*I think we're reliant on taking stuff from our panels and case notes, and then also it's about perception and around what is extra-familial harm, and because there's often usually a number of reasons why placements are moved or a number of complexities around the risks with young people. And because it's not recorded clearly in one place, you're relying on interpretations.* (Interview, LA-B)

*We're aware, basically, there's issues with the overall tracking….That's the one thing we'll take away from it… But, to be honest, it's the best that we're going to be able to do short of actually sitting and going through every single child on over a hundred- long spreadsheet.* (Interview, LA-D)

*That is certainly one of the learnings from this survey, the participation so far has been that without that manual trawl it would've been impossible to give that data to you… We have [practitioner name] who collects the spreadsheet of all the children, if they're placed in or out of county, and then I had to cross-reference that against our child exploitation list which does say whether they're looked after or not. Cross everything against that and then I had to then do a third process of manually trawling Mosaic, our case system, to be able to look at the young people and try and find the reason for their placement, because quite often, what we found was that children had been placed and they were on the exploitation list but they hadn't necessarily been placed for extra-familial risk, however part of their placement was to safeguard against that risk. So it's a bit of a messy cyclical route.* (Interview, LA-E)

*We ran a report on every single open case as of that month and then had to manually go through each of them to go back to the original reason for referral to see if those were for reasons of extra-familial harm, and if so what were they, but then also double checking with social workers or team managers if there had been any concerns during that month of September, which meant that they fitted the second criteria that you wanted us to report on. So it took a long time as there was over 1,000 young people that I had to look into, so it was a very manual task.* (Interview, LA-F)

*I'm sure you've had that feedback from other people, because no-one keeps a specific list on the reasons why children are in care or in each of the placements.  So it was very much a case of going around talking to individual team managers once the list had been provided through our performance teams to go through and find out, well, why is that particular child in that particular setting?* (Interview, LA-M)

*One of the things we recognise is that we do hold an enormous amount of data that's in a narrative format, which would undoubtedly be helpful to be able to rip off and theme and code to get a sense, so I imagine there's probably a lot more data but it would be more of a manual trawl to try and pull out some of those themes which then could possibly inform the likes of this work. But it's just too difficult a task at this time to pull that out. (*Interview, LA-H)

Underlying the challenge of recording and reporting on categories of EFH were problems of definition. As no local authority had a means by which to report on all forms of extra-familial harm, manual processes, which included reviewing records from exploitation panels, case notes and manual surveys of practitioners regarding open cases, were all sited as workarounds. As one participant noted below, this unearthed ambiguity and uncertainty about how harm is defined and how shared definitions are applied and operationalised across the workforce

*What I thought would be a simple task has actually unearthed some issues around how we collect information around extra-familial risk. (Interview, LA-K)*

*Some of the things I'm still not sure that we could've easily generated and the difficulty probably brings us back down to these differentials between the types of exploitation, because I don't think we're going to create flags that will say, you can pick several. I think we might pick a flag that will say sexual, criminal or both or other, maybe, but you become reliant then on a person populating it accurately.* (Interview, LA-A)

*I created a spreadsheet and sent it out to all the managers and said "complete this over the month of September", and every single one came back with young people, with child exploitation, which some of that covers modern slavery and trafficking because of the nature of that. But I had to go back to them and say "you haven't sent me anything on serious youth violence or peer on peer. So I've had to go back and prompt them to fill that in, but I have an oversight of some of those issues anyway as part of my role, so I was able to identify some of them. Because it's only a month it's a lot easier, if it had been over the last 12 months it would be different.* (Interview, LA-J)

*In terms of data, the other challenge I had with defining that cohort, serious youth violence, I've asked my colleagues in YOS [the Youth Offending Service] about that and whilst they know of the names of young people that commit serious youth violence and are involved in it, there isn't currently a defined cohort of what it is to be in that cohort.* (Interview, LA-L)

## Conditions for relocation

For the 11 out of 13 areas that reported using relocations in response to extra-familial harm, the principle driver for their decisions appeared to be concern for the physical safety of the young person. For them, out-of-area or secure placements were used when the physical risks facing the child warranted distance:

*The risk has to be really high because we're moving them away from positive attachments.* (Interview, LA-B)

*We've worked really hard to improve practice so that we're working to keep children safe in their community where we can. But there actually may be times when children aren't safe in their communities and that we don't have the joint buy in that perhaps we would like in order to keep those communities safer. We have had to move children out of area.* (Interview, LA-E)

*On the occasions that we have moved out of borough, it would have been mainly in relation to safety, so if there's a concern, a drug debt for example, the young person saying they were receiving threats, then we would look at placing outside of borough, but we tend to look at neighbouring boroughs as the first resort, providing there's no added risks to them, and then there's probably not that many that are placed even further away.* (Interview, LA-F)

Not having local alternatives available was raised by five areas as an additional reason for placing children at a distance from their families and communities when they faced extra-familial risk. In some situations this was due to reluctance by local providers or foster parents to support young people at risk of criminality and associated violence; and on other occasions it was to seek out specialist therapeutic settings that were available in the local area:

*People I have found, particularly where there's violence involved, are very reluctant to offer provision for children, particularly boys, if there's any indications of weapons or organised violence. So what we've often ended up doing or what we've often had are offers from bespoke providers that could be all over the country and its dependent on the particular time that we're doing a search as to what's available.* (Interview, LA-E)

*Sometimes we might not move a young person because… we want them out of area. It might be more because of placement availability. The market's completely saturated.* (Interview LA-J)

It is notable the local authorities who reported no or low relocations in the month of September could identify local alternatives, especially investment in foster carers or forms of specialist local authority residential provision, as a way to avoiding the need to use distant placements:

> *We do have a number of foster carers as well that we've trained and retained that… have had probably developed a specialist approach to working with these young people.* (Interview LA-H)

These sites also reported having made a strategic decision that relocation was not going to be used to safeguard young people at risk of extra-familial harm.

> *We always look to trying to place young people within our own service area because we know that actually we do better quite often, and we are able to support better. So that's our position.* (Interview LA-C)

Similarly, a number of areas caveated their use of relocation with commentary around the challenges that come with the practice – and the need to only use it in circumstances where the risk warranted it and other options weren't available:

> *It's a last resort because a number of the young people are settled and it's been quite hard, they've got positive attachments in their foster placements, local foster placements, and so, we've had long discussions about the pros and cons of moving.* (Interview, LA-B)

> *I know from the senior managers involved in those discussions there is a considerable pushback at looking at a solution that puts a child out of the area. Accessing the services is just not as easy.* It's not a decision that's easily come to. (Interview LA-A)

One respondent spoke more favourably of the approach as something to be used not solely as a final option. This site also had one of the greatest rates of relocation of all participants.

Other local authorities requested further support to understand the conditions in which relocations could be used in a more preventative and disruptive fashion, particularly as a short-term break for a young person (to create stability and safety). Sites who offered this reflection viewed it as ambition rather than reflection on current practices.



*Figure 1 Three Intersecting Conditions of Relocation*

Three intersecting drivers appeared to create the conditions in which young people were relocated (or not) in response to extra-familial risk: the severity of the risks faced by young people that professionals felt unable to address; the availability of local placements that were an alternative to relocation; and the cultural attitude of the authority towards the use of relocation.

## Purpose, use and perceived impact of relocation

The purpose, use and perceived impact of relocations were discussed in four key ways during debrief interviews and are analysed here using Shuker's multi-dimensional model of safety (2013) which outlines three components of safety that should be considered when evaluating service or intervention impact: physical, relational and emotional safety.

Professionals discussed relocations being used to: secure, young people's physical safety; disrupt exploitative relationships and/or stabilise protective ones; provide a young person with an environment in which they could engage with therapeutic support and/or increase their sense of psychological safety; and respond to organisational demands from both within children's services and from partner agencies. In this section each of these matters will be considered in turn before turning attention to whether these ambitions are being realised in practice.

### *Physical safety*

As noted in the previous section, during interviews professionals stated that severe and escalating risks created the conditions in which relocations were often used. Given this, it is somewhat unsurprising that relocation was first and foremost described as an intervention used for the purpose of safeguarding a young person's physical safety.

> *You'd jump to quicker than you would with the sexual side of exploitation because the risk is suddenly there and to keep in that locality is so obviously dangerous. It's not about being able to do work with that person to try and keep them safe, the threat is in the street.* (Interview, LA-A)

> *If I look at the list of young people, particularly the looked-after children that are placed out of borough, I would probably say that 98% of those have been placed out of borough due to concerns in relation to exploitation, their safety around serious group violence, or their criminality, without a doubt.* (Interview, LA-F)

In short, the physical risks posed to a young person exist in that community context; an out-of-area placement is used to move a young person into a context where those risks don't exist. But while physical safety was the most frequently referenced reason for moving a young person, there was little consideration given to whether physical safety was achieved through these interventions, and in what ways relocations might be undermine physical safety. Survey returns, for example, reported that 81 of the 215 young people had been missing from their placement, with 502 missing episodes in total. Some sites notified us that their missing figures related to a small number of young people in OOA placements who had multiple missing episodes. While we do not know the circumstances of these missing episodes, relational pulls and pushes from placements are strong and physical risks to young people can be increased during these periods. Situations that result in young people going missing from placements could increase risks to their physical safety. In this sense it was notable that interviews didn't surface many examples of how to safeguard physical safety when young people were in out-of-area placements; instead the placement was viewed as the route to safety itself.

The limited consideration given to whether physical safety could be undermined by relocations was contrasted by the extensive attention paid to how relocations might disrupt protective relationships – and in doing so increase risks to young people. At the same time however, much of what emerged in the interviews was the use of relocation to physically extricate a young person from a community context in which they were in exploitative relationships. In both sets of commentary, relational, as well as physical, safety came into view.

### Relational safety

During interviews, professionals described how relocations were used to disrupt relationships between a young person and the peers/adults who were exploiting them:

> [It's a] really important approach to take to keep a child safe and sometimes actually you do need that real clear break in terms of helping a young person to get away from the area and away from the perpetrators of exploitation and abuse in order to really start the work to safeguard. (Interview, LA-D)

> It's either because there's gang links in the local area or there's negative peers in the local area that are seen as a big risk to them so they have to be moved away from them. Give them a fresh start almost. Some of these young people though, it's girls that have been placed long distances because the persons of interest live locally and would continue to live there. (Interview LA-L)

> In fact we had a young man that recently asked us to move him out of the area because he could not get out or [extricate] himself from the network of drug dealers that he was being controlled by. (Interview, LA-E)

In these accounts, relational safety, or lack thereof, came to the fore. However, professionals didn't solely view relocation as a route to dismantling 'harmful' relationships. They also saw it as creating the conditions for securing or stabilising protective relationships; relationships with parents or professionals that had been threatened by the precarious situation the young person was in:

> We've got one girl in particular, she was moved out of [area] specifically to a therapeutic placement that specialises in CSE, purely because of her needs and vulnerabilities, because we needed that relational work done with her. (Interview, LA-E).

> Sometimes actually you do need that real clear break in terms of helping a young person to get away from the area and away from the perpetrators of exploitation and abuse in order to really start the work to safeguard. (Interview, LA-D)

> Most of the ones that are in placements because of the concerns and them maybe needing specialist [support], I was quite struck by the relationships that those places have built with the young person and the information sharing with the social worker. I know for definite that at least one of those, the key worker in her placement is probably the only person she speaks to. (Interview, LA-F)

A number of professionals described the steps taken to maintain relationships between practitioners and young people who had been placed at a distance from their home local authority. They recognised that in moving a young person away they risked fracturing stable and supportive relationships, which were relevant to a young person's safety, and therefore needed to take steps to protect this where possible.

> Of course we'd have to look at their education if they're moved out of the borough and then we'd have to look at the whole issue around contact with key people, attachment figures. And then their care plan really, what's their care plan going forward. (Interview, LA-A)

> There's really good examples where social workers have gone up initially every week or every fortnight, they've worked really hard to support contact that's been supported by staff to build relationships, they've supported young people to attend court through their proceedings and co-design their care plans. And they've moved from positions of conflict to positions of agreement across the family network. They've also supported the

*network around the child having ownership of their network around them and legally some of the care planning.* (Interview, LA-E)

*If we've already got an established relationship with the young person then it doesn't matter where they are placed in the country. If we feel they need our ongoing service, we'll provide that.* (Interview, LA-J)

*[Voluntary and Community Sector service] is our service for sexually exploited children, the route for our service for criminally exploited young people, so we would expect them to be able to travel to wherever that child is placed to make sure that meaningful work is being done whilst they are in a place of safety.* (Interview, LA-K)

Despite these attempts to protect relationships, professionals noted the ways in which relocations threatened the relational safety that young people may have experienced in a neighbourhood or community space in which their physical safety was compromised. Professionals were not always able to maintain the level of contact with a young person that was possible when they lived in their home local authority – and instead were only able to offer statutory social work visits while children were placed out of area. As such, a concern to safeguard relational safety appeared to be a key driver for areas who reported no, or a minimal number of, out-of-area placements as a response to extra-familial harm:

*The ones that are more complicated is when they're really at a distance and then often our local services aren't able to continue to support. So, we might ask them to do that virtually or go less frequently… we might ask our voluntary sector services to visit in person six weekly rather than weekly, but use telephone and text contact, and email contact… Obviously, the children who are really at a distance are the ones where it can be really challenging to support the network around them, to move with them, which is why we try not to do it really.* (Interview, LA-L)

*It takes them out of the area, it takes them away from their family, and you can't support them as well. So we've worked hard to bring children back into the authority, and so we have very few cases.* (Interview, LA-C).

## Psychological safety

Across the interviews less reference was made to the psychological and emotional well-being of young people when relocation was used. A small number of participants specifically referenced using an out-of-area placement with the purpose of a young person accessing therapeutic support (n=3). A similar number stated that relocations provided young people with an emotional break from the fear they experienced in their communities – and that having this break provided young people with the space to engage in some form of therapeutic intervention.

*The first is that we need to find an effective, therapeutic placement and it needs to be away from the area in order to manage the risks and allow the young person to get away and really access support to deal with the issues that's going on.* (Interview, LA-D)

Others identified positive psychological impacts in some instances, without that necessarily being the primary intention for the move:

*We have had some children who've really been successful by having that out-of-area break and usually it's when it's quite an undefined network of perpetrators where disruption and prosecution action are really complicated and where children have shown a capacity or cognitive ability to engage therapeutic work and so their ability to access recovery services is more … that's where we've seen it be more successful.* (Interview, LA-I).

However, professionals who appeared more reluctant to use relocations, or who didn't use them at all, expressed a concern about the psychological impact of relocations on young people. They raised these concerns in tandem with those they shared about relocations disrupting young people's relationships with parents, professionals and their wider communities.

> *We don't believe as an authority it's the right thing to do. Exploitation is everywhere, isn't it, and it's how we try to manage that. I think you're isolating children even more, and the message that you're giving to them by moving them away, you're taking them away from everything that they know.* (Interview, LA-C)

> *I visit [secure unit] quite frequently as the safeguarding lead to do quarterly audits and to speak to the young people, and what they often tell me is that they feel like they're punished, and I guess that accords with some of the research.* (Interview, LA-H).

Unlike concerns about relational safety, professionals from sites who were using relocations provided fewer examples of steps they took to mitigate the negative impact that an out-of-area placement might have on a young people's psychological safety. During interviews professionals provided a range of examples of how relationships were safeguarded during relocations, including attempts to increase visits, or permit commissioned services to charge more to travel further distances. Some interviewees used relocation to create psychological safety, however more identified the negative impacts on psychological safety and there were few strategies explained to mitigate the negative impact. In this sense, psychological safety was seen principally as a reason to relocate young people, or as a reason not to – but was discussed as an element of safety to monitor throughout the process.

### *Organisational and partnership drivers*

A number of interview participants referenced wider drivers in their own organisations, or those of partner agencies, to relocate young people away from unsafe contexts. On these occasions relocations were described as meeting the needs of professionals, or strategic objectives, as well as (or in some cases ahead of) the needs of young people and families.

> *We get quite a lot of pressure from some of our partners to move children out of area.* (Interview, LA-I)

The police were specifically named in interviews as requesting that young people either be moved away from a local area, or not returned to an area following a relocation. In these instances their concerns were viewed as related to the pressure the missing reports placed on the police:

> *There are external pressures from other agencies that would like that child out of the area…*

> *Int: Which agency would that generally be?*

> *The police would be probably the best one to identify, because of course what comes with a lot of those cases is high risk missing or high missing… You imagine that if they are missing and they are of high risk that the demand on the police has got to be a lot more urgent and considerable to locate them. What happens with – and I can speak more confidently with the police than even the local authority – is the responsibility for a child is basically where they live, not which local authority is looking after them. So the police's approach to a child that's living in [area] but is actually looked after and comes from another local authority is immaterial, they will still have the responsibility to find that child. It won't go back to whichever police force that child originates from.* (Interview, LA-A)

*Some of the complicating factors are quite often police don't want them in their area, they want them to send them back, and they'll say we're not having this. This child is causing an awful lot of difficulty, they're going missing regularly, they're getting involved in all sorts of vulnerable activity, they're at massive risk constantly.* (Interview, LA-C)

In addition to reducing pressure on policing resources, local authorities reported relocations giving them the space to develop a longer-term plan for a young person by providing an interim period of respite. They reported needing to take a young person out of a dangerous situation so that they could then take measured steps to secure a sustainable safety plan for that young person. Without this break they felt they would continue to firefight crisis situations without any room to forward plan. There were varying degrees to which this was achieved:

*So the plan would almost always be for a short-term move to be able to establish some change or safety for that child or different resources that would enable them to move back into the city, be that progress around prosecuting the people offending against them or making changes to their strengths and safety structures to enable them to move back in.* (Interview, LA-I)

*Probably the biggest reflection is that when we come to decisions, how have we come to it, are we confident that it's decision that is right for the child and not a solution that is simply a short term measure to remove pressures.* (Interview, LA-A)

*What tends to happen is you get a child to a place where they're relatively safe, everyone breathes a sigh of relief and then actually the next crisis happens and that [loss of sound] everybody's attention, rather than that kind of focus care planning. So I think there's some work we need to think about there.* (Interview, LA-D)

In summary, therefore, interview participants believed that relocations were used primarily to secure young people's physical safety. A smaller number identified them as a means of safeguarding relational safety, and fewer still were motivated to use them to increase a young person's psychological or emotional well-being. However, during interviews the intersection between these forms of safety also emerged – the need to attend to a young person's relational safety, for example, in order to sustain a placement that had been triggered to protect their physical welfare. Or the provision of physical security then providing the conditions in which psychological safety could be attended to. Many professionals also recognised the risks that relocation posed to young people's relational safety and took steps to address this – either by minimising the use of relocation, or making conscious efforts to maintain protective relationships during periods where a young person was living at a distance from their home authority. The psychological impacts of relocation were less readily considered –either as a reason to relocate or as something to be protected during a placement.

Beyond meeting the needs of young people and families, professionals identified organisational drivers for some relocations: they were used to give professionals a break from crisis management to develop a long term plan, or to reduce the pressure on a police force that was managing repeated episodes of young people going missing.

The challenge identified by participants, however, was that the purpose of relocation – to safeguard a young person's physical safety or to repair protective relationships for example – was not always realised. During interviews, professionals identified a kaleidoscope of ways in which the impact of relocations (on young people, families and/or professionals) frustrated the intention behind their use: a tension to be resolved if relocations (out-of-area placements and secure) are to remain an effective tool in local responses to extra-familial harm.

## Tensions of relocation: Purpose vs. Impact

During debrief interviews, professionals identified three issues that compromised the efficacy of relocations in response to extra-familial harm. These were: the target of interventions that occurred prior to versus during a relocation; the support in place for young people to transition out of relocations; and a lack of evidence on the conditions that would best support a relocation to play a role in ensuring a young person's safety.

### *Focus of intervention (what needs fixing)*

As noted throughout this briefing, relocations were largely described by participants as interventions to remove young people from dangerous situations and provide them a place of physical (and sometimes relational or psychological) safety. In order to realise this ambition, interviewees explained that in theory, relocations should be time-limited, and provide professionals with the space to make it safe for a young person to return to their home authority. This would mean that physical safety was achieved in the short and long term, and relational and psychological safety for the young person had been protected. And yet interviews suggested the extent to which these ambitions was realised varied, a variability informed by where interventions were focused during the relocation period.

When asked what interventions were used while a young person was relocated all respondents who used this form of intervention described work with the young person:

> *It is very tricky and perpetrators, we all know, are very devious and will go to lengths to try and still find the young people. So, we have issues, difficult issues around phones and social media and access to phones and social media. [Inaudible]…want to be supportive and nurturing but at the same time, having to be quite firm about some of these things, so it's very difficult.* (Interview, LA-B)

> *An education provision on site or for a local educational provider, diversity activities, one to one supervision mentoring, some say they offer therapeutic interventions, but it varies what they mean by that… Other providers you can purchase enhanced packages of care, so that could be things like two to one support. Some young people, we've funded them being the sole young person in placement, and things like that.* (Interview, LA-G)

Some participants did describe efforts at contextual intervention during relocation periods, however for the most part contextual work featured interventions to disrupt harm rather than increasing safety or guardianship in areas, with large focus on policing:

> *The plan would almost always be for a short-term move to be able to establish some change or safety for that child or different resources that would enable them to move back into the city, be that progress around prosecuting the people offending against them or making changes to their strengths and safety structures to enable them to move back in.* (Interview, LA-I)

> *Planning around the friendship groups, the peers, you actually move them out of the area to try and sever those contacts.* (Intervention, LA-A)

> *Well you would hope that the police would be actively trying to prosecute or disrupt the perpetrator if that hasn't already happened, so that they can return and be safe.* (Interview, LA-K)

However others commented that they had far fewer examples of interventions with the contexts or groups than with the young person themselves and reflected on this mismatch:

*To be honest, I think the main thing I've seen more is actually about the work focusing on the young person and on their care plan and on therapeutic work for them to enable themselves to stay safe as opposed to the disruption.* (Interview, LA-D)

It was therefore interesting to note that professionals provided far more examples of contextual activities that were tried prior to a relocation – with the relocation being used when these actions proved insufficient to safeguard a young person.

*…multiagency discussions around that and working with schools and colleges, working with the carers and placements about really managing the day to day risks and trying to advise and support young people about those risks and reassure them around the enforcement part of it, in terms of trying to get out notices and get prosecutions where possible.* (Interview, LA-B)

*We map out. We do a lot of that where we might have something going on in one area and then something similar in another, and then we map them to see if they're connected. Through our, what used to be called VEMT meetings, vulnerable exploitation meetings, you would map them and you would share the information. So if there's any concern from partners everybody gets to hear that, and then you're able to see if there's links then with other areas and other young people. The police are very much involved within that, and it's all about trying to disrupt, and having that shared information and knowledge.* (Interview, LA-C)

*A lot of workers working with those two young women and also another two that were friends with them… they did try to do joint group work with those young people, the base simply being perhaps if we could influence the dynamic between the children we could increase safety within their own relationships. I know that the youth offending team were heavily involved as well.* (Interview, LA-E)

*We have had to evidence that we've tried the Families Together approach with them, offering that intense intervention, we've tried rebuilding relationships, we've tried disruption, we've tried working with the police, we just have to make sure we do all of that before we even consider moving them out.* (Interview, LA-F)

Much of these pre-relocation interventions suggest an out-of-area or secure placement is seen as an intervention of last resort: a myriad of individual, family and broader contextual work was identified prior to a move. However, once the decision to relocate was made, the interventions described by participants focused far more on the young person who had been moved and less on the situation that they had been moved from. During a relocation it wasn't uncommon for practitioners to report a focus on interventions with the young person – supporting that young person, providing them with some space in which risks could de-escalate and they could return, better able to navigate their community, peer associations, etc. As a result, despite being framed as a response to largely contextual risks, relocations were often used as an intervention with an individual child – and did not appear to simultaneously address the situations that originally compromised that child's safety on a consistent basis. Areas that didn't use out-of-area placements, or reported using them in a highly restrictive manner, focused on creating safety around the young person, rather than solely in the young person: thereby giving primacy to safety through relationships and community support.

### Transition out of placements and into adulthood

Areas that struggled to intervene with the contextual drivers of relocations while a young person was in a placement also reported difficulties in bringing young people back to their home authorities. The interview data suggested that many out-of-area placements were intended to be short term, however the survey data indicated that many relocations were planned for longer periods. Just under half of the participants provided data on how long

relocations were planned for (n=118): 41 relocations were planned for up to three months, 36 for three months to a year, 20 for one to two years and a further 21 for over two years. While a number of factors will determine how long a placement is planned for, the discrepancy and the lack of available data on planned placement length suggests transitional planning, i.e. planning for a young person to return home, requires further attention at the point of the decision to move.

> *If they're teenagers and doing pathway plans, what do you do about getting them back into the area? Or is the longer term plan for them to settle where they are and then it's about how you do that and set up their support networks?* (Interview, LA-B)

> *Sometimes you're not necessarily ready to bring them back, the safety hasn't yet been mitigated or the risk hasn't been mitigated. But time is of such an essence that you need to do something to try and reintegrate them while you have a little bit of influence and control rather than they'll just arrive.* (Interview, LA-A)

> *We know these children aren't likely to come back to [area] and how we maintain connected networks or for some of our children who are out of area who want connected networks where they've been placed, how that's sustained or supported in the longer term. I think we need to do some more thinking on that really.* (Interview, LA-I)

Professionals recognised that many young people want to come back to their home authorities – and if this isn't coordinated by the local authority, once that young person turns 18 they may do so of their own accord. Interventions are therefore needed to enable young people to safely transition out of relocations – and yet, a lack of contextual intervention meant that wasn't a consistent possibility for young people in the dataset:

> *Sometimes it's a time thing and becomes inevitable because as that child becomes older, and you know that they are approaching not only an age whereby they can vote with their feet but actually there's no statutory powers to stop them, you've really got to think about how you're going to reintegrate them back into an environment that you've identified as being potentially unsafe because if you don't and they reach that 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, they're coming anyway without that period of readjustment back into the area.* (Interview, LA-A)

> *There's a massive issue with 17 year olds and transitioning, you know, ultimately Children's Services, in my opinion aren't set up to work with children once they're 16, because the law just doesn't help us.* (Interview, LA-M)

Sites also reported additional complexities when young people wanted to remain either in areas to which they had been relocated or near to young people they had met when spending time in secure or residential settings:

> *I do know of one young person who has moved away and it's proving successful, the challenge now is embedding him in that local community, and where is his local community, because he's from [area], local community is [area], but he's created different opportunities in his new area, which leaves him isolated and does prove challenging for us to find as close ongoing support as we'd like.* (Interview, LA-G)

> *The child we're talking about going to Z, I think she went to X first, then she's been moved to Y and now she's in Z and it seems inevitable that she will end up staying in Z. There has been planning in that case but the ambition would've been to bring her back to this environment, this home, this life here but the reality is while we still have some influence, I think it's about six, seven, eight months maybe left before they reach that 18th birthday, while we still have some influence we might be able to stabilise and create an environment and support them in that environment (area Z). Our resistance and*

*forcing them back to one place they don't want to be is not going to work.* (Interview, LA-A)

In these examples, young people had built a sense of relational safety during the relocation period, and ending the placement threatened that sense of security. It was encouraging to hear how professionals were attempting to listen to, and engage with, young people's views when forming decisions about transitions. However, the challenges that transition more generally posed to professionals, young people and their families was cited as another reason, by some professionals, to minimise the use of relocation in the first place.

The challenges of transitioning out of relocations and either back to a home authority and/or into adulthood raised questions about the conditions in which relocation could safeguard young people's welfare and those in which it might compromise it – particularly in the medium to long term – for example by disrupting young people's relationships, their on-going access to existing services and their sense of belonging in a particular area.

## *Assessing the conditions of effective relocations*

For the most part relocations appear to be used in situations of crisis. Some practitioners reflected how this left them without a clear sense of the conditions in which relocations were best used, and ones in which they would most likely prove ineffective.

> *A young person who was being trafficked and sexually abused by, I believe, an organised network. We never really were able to ascertain the organisation but essentially what we couldn't do was provide enough control in the local area in order to stop that child suffering such significant harm. What we found is that a lot of the concern had been: "if we move her, she'll run away – what difference is it going to make?" And what we observed is that that child went willingly into the care because it's too late now and I think what that said to me is that we focus so much on seeing a child moving out of area for safety as a problem that we fail to safeguard children that needed that response.* (Interview, LA-E)

> *I guess what I'm really interested in is whether we could use them better earlier because we use them as the last resort but by that point … like if we were in a better place to say, "These are the children for whom it's going to work well for or that we have some indicators for," we may use relocation or out of area better, rather than seeing it as the last option and like that we jumped through hoops to get out of area. And I think that's where our nuanced assessment is really challenging because the evidence and research is quite sketchy, isn't it?* (Interview, LA-I)

Six interview participants were able to provide case examples of how relocations had safeguarded young people

> *What I've seen in some other case files is where children have been able to settle in a place of safety then they're able to make disclosures about things that have happened, which enables some of that work to take place.* (Interview, LA-D)

> *That handover was done very closely, and with her as well, she was fully part of that, that was a family decision to move her back, the family back to that area, the police had quite a lot of reservations about that because of the risk that they thought she may be at, but she met with them and she developed her own safety plan, and I read it, it was amazing, they literally said, "Give us your safety plan and we'll support that where you need us to", so that was done.* (Interview, LA-F)

Within these examples, and the wider findings reported in this briefing, were some emerging indications of relocation success.

The first of these is that for relocations to be successful, phase one data suggests that they need to be accompanied by interventions to create safety in the community, school or group context that drove the initial need to relocate. For the most part, professionals had short-term ambitions for relocation, but struggled to achieve them due to persistent community or peer-based concerns. Attending to the contextual drivers of a relocation can create the space in which a young person can return to their family and community. In this sense, plans for reunification in cases of extra-familial harm extend beyond preparing families to preparing contexts. In some interviews, professionals reflected that relocations had been used to 'fix' the young person – intervene with them through therapeutic care or education so they could return to a community context which was unchanged, rather than offering a twin approach addressing the young person and the contextual factors affecting their welfare.

The second area of relevance is the extent to which young people are engaged in decisions prior to, during, and at the end of a relocation. Transition out of relocations – particularly when they would coincide with transition into adult services –often appeared to be the stage when young people's views were more readily considered. We heard less about the views of young people in reaching a decision to relocate them, and even less about their views while in out-of-area placements to inform contextual interventions and/or plan for transitioning out of placements at a later stage. Given the centrality of young people to the relocation process, more needs to be understood about their perspective on this approach.

Finally, the majority of concerns aired about the use of relocation were about its impact on young people's relationships with families, peers, communities and professionals. For relocation to be utilised effectively in response to extra-familial harm, avenues for protecting relational safety will need to be identified: this would apply as young people transition into a relocation, out of relocation, and during the relocation experience. Some interview data suggests that when used appropriately – including when coupled with contextual interventions and informed by young people's views – relocations can repair or strengthen relationships that are compromised by extra-familial harm. The concerns raised during interviews, however, suggest that as currently used, relocations can dismantle protective relationships – and in doing so undermine the physical safety they are intended to safeguard.

Each of these conclusions requires further investigation. They are built solely from the perspective of professionals who participated in this study – and do not necessarily reflect the views of young people, parents or others involved in relocations including foster carers and practitioners who run residential children's homes. Further consideration is also required of how one safeguards young people's psychological safety prior to, during and following a relocation – a matter not consistently attended to in the data collected.

# Phase 1 Recommendations and Conclusions

At this stage in the *Securing Safety* project we have reached a number of interim conclusions.

There appears to be limited oversight of the rates at which relocation is used to safeguard young people from extra-familial harm: particularly harm that isn't categorised as criminal or sexual exploitation; or relocations that occur outside of children's social care processes.

Practitioners are evidently worried about the welfare, and physical safety, of young people affected by extra-familial harm. It is this worry that drives decisions around relocation (when it is used).

A lack of oversight in this area of intervention, and inconsistent planning for transitioning young people back to their original home areas, can undermine the intention of relocations. Despite its intended aims, professionals routinely reported a reluctance to use relocation as an intervention, and a scepticism about its effectiveness at securing the safety of young people beyond addressing immediate risks to safety.

The types of contextual interventions that would create safety and enable a young person to return to their home authority require greater attention – and the effectiveness of relocations needs to be viewed in light of this wider work (or lack thereof).

The financial costs of relocations was mentioned in some interviews, but it did not emerge as a major theme. When cost was discussed, it was that of the placements itself as opposed to the wider costs of initiating, sustaining and ending an out-of-area placement – these appear unknown.

Phase 1 findings point to areas that we will need to explore in Phase 2 of the *Securing Safety* project. These include:

- examining the impact that relocations have on the psychological safety of young people (both positive and negative)
- identifying the ways in which contextual interventions have been used, alongside relocations, to enable young people to return to their home authorities when it is safe to do so
- gathering the views of young people who have been involved in relocations, and the networks around them, to better understand the conditions in which such an intervention can contribute to increasing or securing safety for young people affected by extra-familial harm.

At this stage, despite the gaps in the dataset, we can also make some initial recommendations regarding the use and oversight of relocation in response to extra-familial harm.

1. **We recommend that local authorities are consistent in recording and categorising all forms of extra-familial harm.**

   *Given that the nature of extra-familial harm acts as a driver of relocation, oversight of relocations that happen for this reason needs to be improved. We recommend that the Association of Directors of Children's Services work with the Department for Education to agree how best to record and report this data in the future.*

2. **Case management systems should record all categories of extra-familial harm in a way that is reportable without the need for manual searches.**

   *An inability to accurately record when harm was extra-familial appeared to frustrate the reporting of relocations that occurred for this reason. Therefore, we recommend that*

*Servelec, Liquid Logic and other case management providers liaise with local authorities to agree an overarching way to flag all cases of extra-familial harm with drop downs to name the nature of the harm where possible. It is also important that such flagging systems allow for case files to record instances where harm is both intra- and extra-familial – and for this to be recorded in a reportable, rather than case note, fashion.*

3. **Further evidence is required on effective transitions out of care placements for extra-familial harm**

   *An inability to safely transition out of relocations appears to undermine their long-term effectiveness. We recommend that those studying children in care, including those undertaking The Care Review, commit to building an evidence base on interventions that aid transitions back home following care placements due to extra-familial risk.*

4. **Care planning must address contextual risks in a timely and effective manner to facilitate a return home**

   *We recommend that care plans for young people moved out of their area as a result of extra-familial harm, feature interventions with the contexts that compromised their safety initially in order to aid a return to their families and communities. It is critical that those who inspect or support the development of practice in local authorities consider whether such steps have been taken when reviewing care plans for young people who have been relocated due to extra-familial harm.*

5. **Police forces should adopt a shared position on the use of relocation as a response to extra-familial harm, motivated by the best interests of young people**

   *At present it appears that some police forces are pushing for individuals to be relocated out of their areas to relieve pressures they face, only to create new pressures in the areas the young people are moved to. Given this emergent evidence, we recommend that the national policing leads for missing children, child exploitation, serious youth violence and young people adopt a shared position on the use of relocation in response to extra-familial harm that is underpinned by a commitment to the best interests of young people.*

## Looking forward to phase two

Building on these recommendations, and the evidence base created by phase one of this study, the next phase of *Securing Safety* will focus on the cost and experience of relocations in response to extra-familial harm. Working with three local authorities we will develop case studies from the perspectives of young people, parents, carers and professionals that show how relocation is experienced, the conditions in which it effectively increases safety for young people, and those situations where it may exacerbate risks. The three authorities will also participate in a Cost Calculator exercise with researchers at The Rees Centre, Oxford University, to ascertain the financial costs of relocation activities at present. We will use both elements of this work to produce resources for young people, parents and carers, as well as practitioners, on the conditions in which relocation can have a positive impact on the welfare of young people. In this way we will continue to contribute to an evidence-informed use of relocation as part of a wider suite of contextual interventions that support young people to safely live with their families, friends and wider communities.

Our year one findings illustrate the multiple forms of safety relocations are intended to create for young people, as well as addressing some organisational demands and the concerns of practitioners that extra-familial harm can create. Despite these intentions, the extent to which young people, parents, carers, professionals and organisations do benefit from relocations in

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cases of extra-familial harm remains in question. By discussing these findings with young people, their parents and professionals, we will ask, and aim to answer, the conditions in which relocations enable a "sigh of relief" as well as for whom.

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